Effects of the 2025 Common Octopus Bloom on the Fishing Industry in the Southwest of the UK

Non-Technical Summary

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Introduction: When the octopus bloom began

Throughout 2025, the southwest of the UK experienced its largest octopus bloom in at least 75 years. Warming seas and shifting currents created ideal conditions for common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*), disrupting traditional fisheries. While some fishermen adapted and profited, many faced significant losses. This summary explains what happened, how it affected the industry, and what we recommend happen next.

The phenomenon appears to have been driven by unusual ocean conditions, including elevated sea temperatures and altered current patterns. These changes favoured octopus populations but reduced species such as crabs, lobsters, and scallops, due to predation by octopus both in shellfish pots and on the seabed. This event highlights the vulnerability of marine ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

What happened?

The bloom appears to have been driven by a combination of environmental factors. Unusually high sea temperatures over the past 18 months created ideal conditions for octopus breeding and growth in areas outside the UK. Long spells of easterly winds then carried newly hatched octopus into UK waters via ocean currents, likely from the Channel Islands.

By spring last year, octopus numbers off Devon and Cornwall were soaring as they thrived in the unusually warm sea temperatures. Fishermen first noticed the surge around Salcombe and Start Point in January. Catches built up and spread westward, peaking in May, June, and July before declining in late summer.

Photo by Olivia Langmead

Impact on fishermen, livelihoods and coastal communities

To understand the real-world effects, the Marine Biological Association (MBA) in collaboration with Plymouth Marine Laboratory, the University of Plymouth and an independent consultant surveyed 40 fishermen – mostly potters targeting crabs and lobsters across Devon, Cornwall, the Channel Isles, and the Isles of Scilly. The research team also analysed landings data for octopus and key shellfish species.

The study, Common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*) blooms off the Southwest of the UK: History, trends, causes and consequences, was funded by Defra, Plymouth City Council and Devon County Council and draws on data from scientists, fishermen and citizen scientists.

The results reveal that a dramatic population bloom of the common octopus off the southwest coast of the UK is having significant effects on fisheries and marine ecosystems.

What did the scientists find?

The results tell a story of mixed fortunes:

57.6% of crab and lobster fishermen reported negative impacts on their business between January and August.

27.3% said the bloom had a positive effect, often because they adapted to catching octopus.

15.2% reported a neutral impact.

Photo by Olivia Langmead

For many, the bloom meant severe losses. Octopus are voracious predators. They attacked crabs, lobsters, and even scallops in pots, and likely in the wild on the seabed. Some fishermen adapted by switching gear and targeting octopus, but this was not universal.

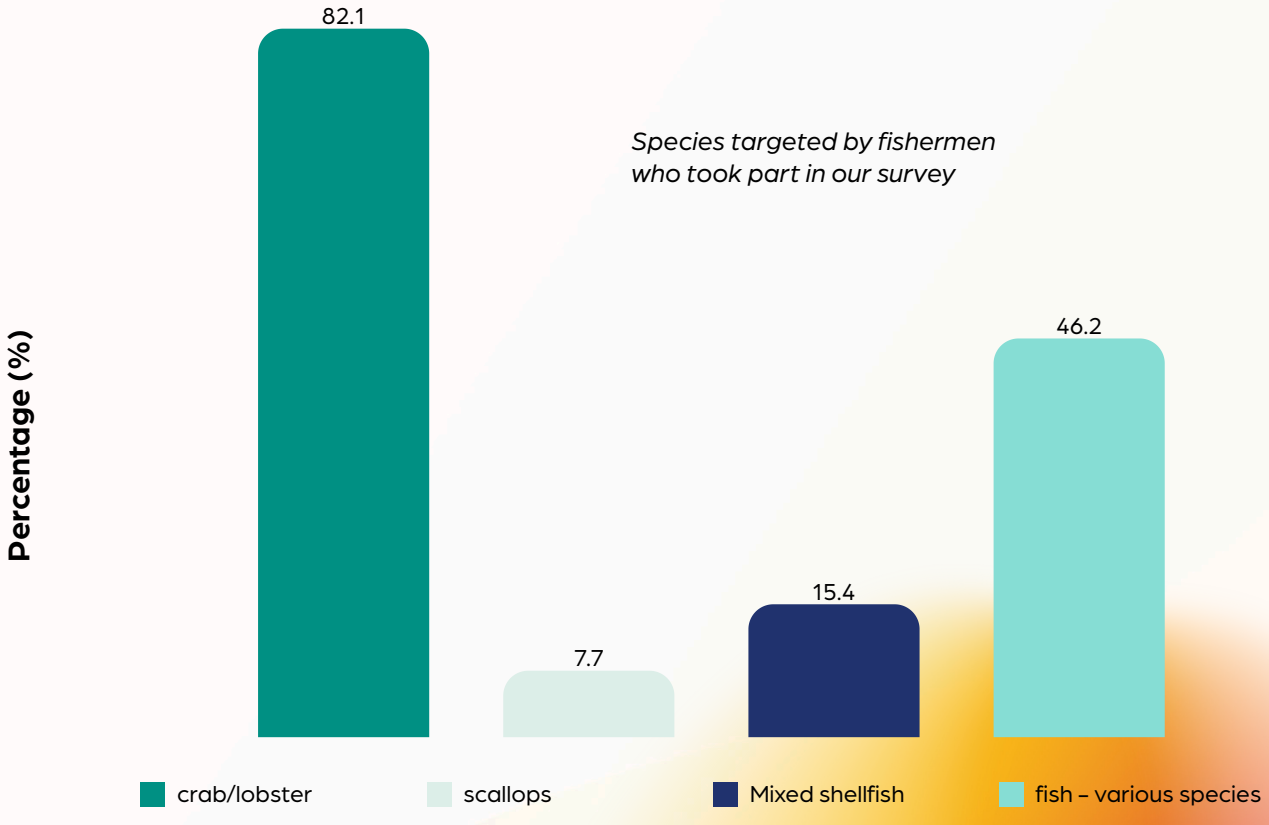
"I would rather have the old shellfish fishery back. It was steady – you knew what was likely next year. My lobster catch is down by half and crab by 90%. We haul 135 pots now and you'll be lucky to see a brown crab. Next year is not going to be good, or probably the next five for shell fishing without octopus." *(Southwest UK fisherman, August 2025)*

The numbers that tell the real story

Landings data confirm the scale of disruption:

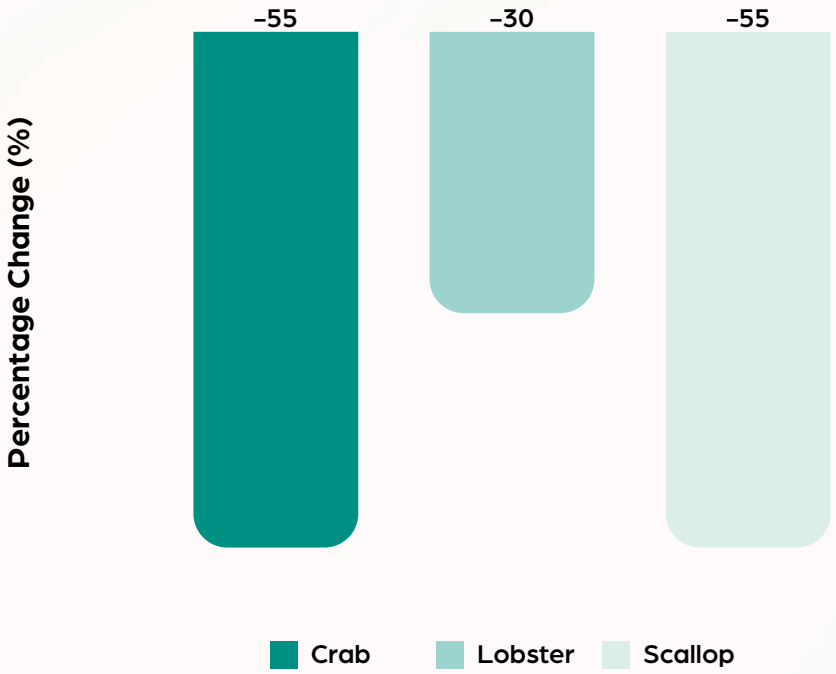
- Brown crab and scallop catches fell by over 50% compared to recent averages.
- Lobster catches dropped by 30%.
- The value of common octopus landings to surged to between £6.7 and 9.4 million from January and August, but many fishermen were still out of pocket due to decreased catches of crabs, lobsters and scallops.

Unfortunately, these gains also appear to have been short-lived. Octopus catches for most fishermen declined sharply after August, while shellfish stocks remained low. For many fishermen, the fear is not just about this year; it's about what comes next.



2025 Common Octopus Bloom

Declines in catches of brown crabs, lobsters and scallops in the Western Channel up to September 2025 compared to the average of catches during the same period 2021–2024 (data: MMO).



Species	Change in landings (t)	Change in value (£)
Brown crabs	-1206.44	-£3,187,230
European lobster	-87.57	-£1,405,506
King scallops	-3164.58	-£6,040,646
Total Deficit	**-4440.59**	**-£10,633,382**

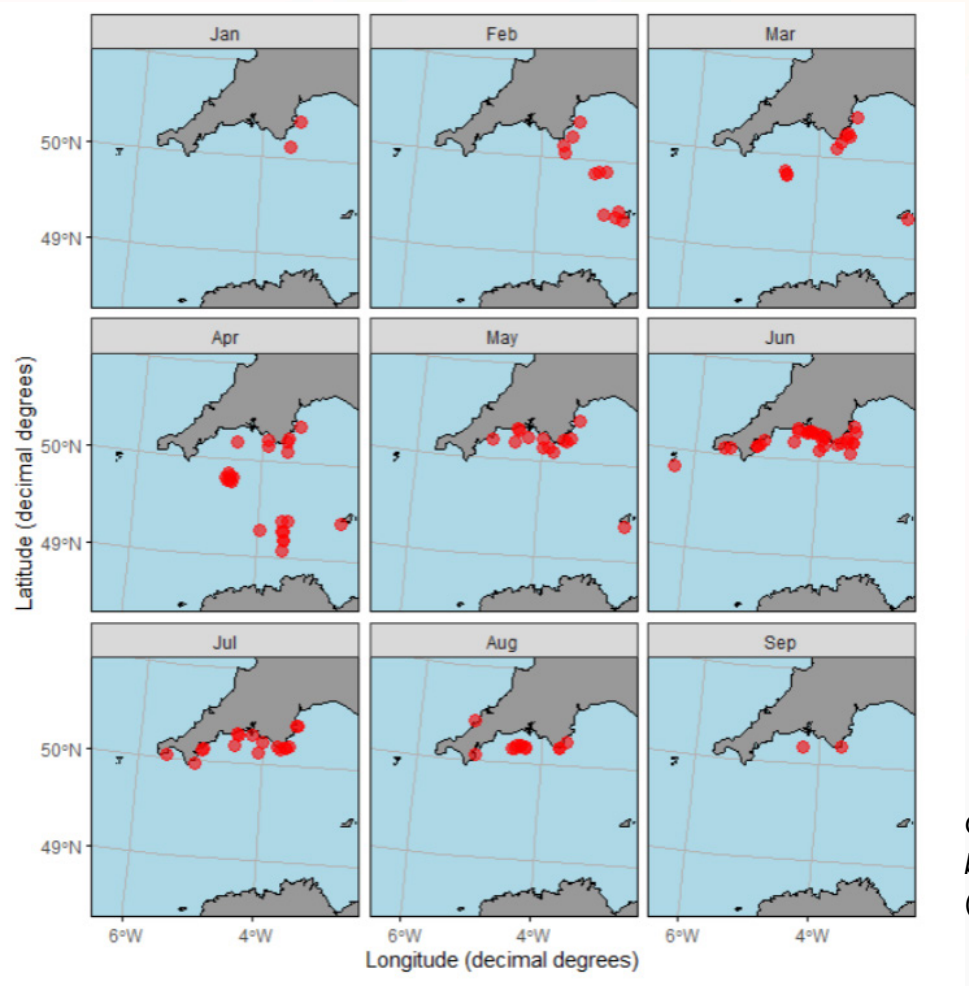
Why these findings matter

This is more than a local issue. Octopus blooms have been reported in Brittany since 2021 and the Channel Islands since 2024. Warmer seas, driven by climate change, make such events increasingly likely. If octopus numbers remain high – or if they crash after depleting shellfish stocks – the consequences for coastal fishing communities could be severe.

Stable fisheries are the backbone of these communities. Sudden, unpredictable changes threaten livelihoods, traditions, and local economies. This is a wake-up call for policy makers; marine ecosystems are changing fast, and management systems must adapt.

Photo by Olivia Langmead

2025 Common Octopus Bloom



Catches of octopus reported by fishermen in our study (Jan–Sept 2025).

Photo below South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen.

Photo by Olivia Langmead

What could happen next?

Our survey showed that fishermen are deeply concerned about the future. If octopus disappear this year but shellfish stocks remain depleted, many fear they will have little left to catch. The chance of another bloom appears to be high, given the link to warmer conditions and that breeding of octopus has been widespread in UK waters in 2025. Climate change is not a distant threat; it is here, reshaping our ocean and the future of those who rely on it for their income.

What does the report recommend?

Our survey revealed clear priorities from fishermen:

Gear adaptation: Support for buying octopus-specific pots and traps.

Infrastructure: Better access to ice and specialised fish boxes.

Handling standards: We saw interest in stunners and a code of conduct for humane dispatching of octopus.

Beyond these immediate needs, we recommend:

Monitoring and research: Ongoing support for trawl surveys, underwater video monitoring, and enhanced stock assessments. Develop models to predict blooms and track octopus movements.

Data sharing: Create easy ways for fishermen to report observations, through apps or existing catch systems.

Collaboration: Bring together government, scientists, and industry to plan for future events.

Impact assessment: Conduct an urgent economic and social assessment of the ongoing effects of the octopus bloom.

This is a shared challenge

No one can predict exactly what the next five years will bring. But one thing is obvious – the fishing industry is on the frontline of the effects of warming seas. The 2025 octopus bloom is a stark reminder that adaptation is not an option, it is essential.

By bringing together fishermen, scientists, and policy makers, we can turn this challenge into an opportunity to build a more resilient, sustainable future for our ocean, fisheries and the communities that depend on them.

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Photo by Olivia Langmead